

## **An emotional Jesus**

Mark 3:1-6

February 18, 2018

Are you an emotional person? I hope you are.

When we use the word “emotional” to describe someone, we often mean it not in a good way. An “emotional” person is unpredictable, unsteady, flighty, sometimes even out of control. Out of control because their emotions take over. Out of control because they fail to let their thoughts keep their emotions in check. They act rashly, without thinking, saying and doing things a person with better self-control would not say or do.

But “emotional” in its basic sense means simply “having emotions” and we all have emotions. Whether we express them or not, whether we acknowledge them or not, we all have emotions: joy and sadness, anger and fear, eagerness and surprise, affection and disgust. Having emotions is part of being human, a most important part of being human. We think and we feel.

Our thinking allows us to observe and decipher the world around us. We analyze and organize and plan and judge and dream. But our feeling connects us to the world around us. By our feelings we are touched by people and things and by our feelings we touch them in return. Thinking by its nature keeps us always at a distance, but feeling brings us in close.

Both feeling and thinking, thoughts and emotions, are essential to who we are. If we were only feeling without thinking, we would risk “going off the tracks.” We need thinking to help us sort and evaluate and steer our feelings. But if we were only thinking without feeling -- oh, my! Would you want to live in that world? Feelings literally give substance and body to our thoughts and make us real, make us real to each other.

So when I ask, “Are you an emotional person?,” what I mean is, do you acknowledge and appreciate and put value on the full range of emotions that make you who you are? I hope you do. I hope you are an emotional person.

Jesus is an emotional person. He is not pure will, pure thought, the embodiment of some kind of unflappable and unwavering ideal. If he were, he would not be an embodiment at all, but only a lifeless idea. Jesus is a flesh and blood human being, feeling what we feel: surprise and anger, doubt and affection, longing and even loneliness. How could we say that Jesus “shares our common lot” if he were something less than human? How could we expect to follow him, to live our lives after him and with him, if he were something other than fully human as we are?

But if Jesus is emotional and we are emotional, where do you suppose emotion came from? Jesus reveals to us a God who feels, a God who does not remain distant and aloof, but who makes connection to his creation and his creatures, loving them, pitying them, growing impatient with them, grieving over them. Our emotions are not an emblem of our human frailty, but the image of God in us.

Passion, emotion, is our theme for Lent. We will be following Jesus in the gospel of Mark, a gospel that seems especially attuned to Jesus' emotions. We will consider the variety of emotions experienced by Jesus and by those who encountered Jesus, not merely for the sake of observing, but for the sake of cultivating our own emotional intelligence and to increase our faith. Because faith is emotional. Faith is a passion. Faith is not mere intellectual assent -- "I believe this" -- but faith is an attachment, a commitment of the whole self involving love and trust and submission and hope. Faith makes an emotional connection.

We begin in Mark 3, with Jesus in the synagogue. But, first, some context. Our story comes at the end of a series of five conflict stories, accounts of things Jesus said or did that raised the hackles of the religious establishment. Jesus had begun his public ministry preaching repentance and healing people, healing many people, people with all sorts of diseases and ailments. News about him spread and crowds flocked to him wherever he went.

So when he stayed in Capernaum, four men had to climb up and cut a hole in the roof to get by the crowds and get their paralyzed friend to Jesus. When Jesus saw their faith and said to the man, "Your sins are forgiven," the religious leaders thought to themselves "Blasphemy!"

Another time, they spied Jesus socializing with tax collectors and other shady characters and they said, "How can he?"

When Jesus' disciples ate and drank while the disciples of the Pharisees and John the Baptist fasted, people asked, "Why?"

The religious leaders were disturbed again when they saw Jesus' disciples picking off heads of grain as they walked through a wheat field on the Sabbath: "Why do you let them break the Law?"

Healing, forgiving, eating and drinking, crossing boundaries, welcoming outcasts, making people well and making people whole. These are the things that scandalized the religious establishment.

One day, Jesus went to church. He came into the synagogue, maybe still in Capernaum. A man was there, a man with a paralyzed hand. Did the man always go to synagogue, every Sabbath? Or was he there just that day, hoping to see Jesus? Did he come that day hoping to see Jesus, hoping Jesus might heal him too?

They watched. They had come to synagogue presumably to offer God their worship, too, but they watched. They watched the man and they watched Jesus. Would Jesus dare? Would Jesus dare flaunt the Sabbath laws against work, against work of any kind? They wanted to catch him, they wanted to prove him wrong, and so they watched.

Why did they want to accuse him? Why did they want to prove him wrong? Because he was disrespecting the Law? Or because he was upsetting the status quo? Or because the people were flocking to him? Because they were

jealous? Because he was able to do for the people what they could not? Because, whether they were conscious of it or not, he exposed the shallowness and impotence of their faith in God?

Jesus knew they were watching, so he stood in front of them and called the man with the paralyzed hand forward. "What does our Law allow us to do on the Sabbath?" he asked them, "to help or to harm? To save someone's life or to destroy it?"

And they were silent.

Nobody said a word.

Jesus asked them, "Should we help this man if we can on the Sabbath?" and they just sat there!

Jesus was ripped! He looked around at them -- mouths shut, hearts cold -- and he seethed with anger. Anger at their silence. Anger at their indifference. Anger at their callousness. Anger at their stubbornness.

And ...

And he felt sorry for them. He grieved for them, because he was not indifferent, because he was not callous, because he cared for the man with the paralyzed hand and for all these people with paralyzed hearts!

Anger and grief. Jesus felt anger and grief.

Emotions are often complex. At my father's memorial service, I felt devastating grief, but also pride and deep gratitude for him and for all his friends who loved him and came to honor him. And now, at this moment, I am both eager and sad, excited for the next chapter in my life, but wanting the days to pass slowly so I will not yet have to let go of so much that is dear to me.

Jesus looked at them, at all the men and women sitting there in silence, and he felt anger and grief, anger tempered by the grief, and grief intensified by the anger. Anger justified by their lack of compassion, and grief birthed from his relentless love, even for them, especially for them.

Anger and grief. Anger and pity. Like God. Like God who rages against sin. Why should God not rage against the sin that destroys all that is good and beautiful in this world and in us? Not to rage is not to care! God rages against sin, but defeats it, not by fire, but by grace, not willing to give up any of his precious children, not willing to give up on even one of his precious children, not demanding our lives, but offering his.

We can learn something from Jesus, and from the God whose nature he embodies, about how to make a difference, about how to respond to the ills and injustices of this world, about how to effect change that matters: by anger and pity.

Anger without pity only entrenches the opposition, only widens the divide, and risks becoming an end, a cause, in itself. I may become the anger, ready to fight, ready to burn, maybe even forgetting what prompted the anger in the first place. Pity without anger mourns what is being lost, but is not motivated to do anything about it. Anger is the canary in the coal mine. It tells me something is wrong, and pity impels me to confront the wrong with love, with love for both oppressed and oppressor, not wanting any to be lost.

Think about it. What are the injustices, the unfairnesses, the cruelties that make you mad? You should be mad at injustice! You should be mad at unfairness! You should rage at cruelty!

So what will do you? And how will you do it? Who are you willing to sacrifice? Who are you willing to write off? If you can and do act with a passion that is equal parts outrage and mercy you may save somebody. But surely you will save yourself.

Jesus did something. He healed the man with the paralyzed hand, despite the objections, despite the risks, because that's what he came to do: to heal. He healed the man and pitied the stubborn people who despised him for it, because he would not write them off. He healed the man for the man's sake and for theirs, because he came to heal them, too.

And they? They walked out of the synagogue in silence, and then made plans to kill him ...